

## **FIRST MINISTERS' MEETING**

February 14, 2022

### **Prime Minister's Opening Remarks:**

- Thank you colleagues for gathering at short notice. And apologies to those in the west for the early hour, but you will see this is an important conversation. As usual, I am joined by Dominic LeBlanc. Ministers Lametti and Mendicino have also joined us for today's discussion.
- It is important that we talk today to talk about the ongoing protests and blockades across the country and what we need to do, together, to address them.
- I know many Canadians across the country are frustrated with the pandemic, frustrated with having our lives disrupted for two years. Canadians have done what we collectively asked of them. They stepped up and got vaccinated. They now want to be able to move on.
- We will always defend the right of freedom of expression. And we believe in the right to peaceful protest.
- But the activities taking place across the country are no longer just about COVID and they have gone well beyond peaceful protest.
- These are organized events, spreading across Canada. Some of these events are supported by money and organizers from outside the country. Particularly the US but also elsewhere around the world. While this may have started in Ottawa, we are seeing flare-ups in almost every jurisdiction. Also echoes around the world.
- Critical infrastructure is being targeted. Ports of entry are experiencing blockages. We are facing significant economic disruptions, with the breakdown of supply chains. Manufacturing plants have had to go idle, and the flow of trade and essential supplies is being threatened at a time where it is already challenging due to COVID disruptions.
- This is costing Canadians their jobs and undermining our economic and national security. It is affecting Canada's reputation internationally, hurting trade and commerce, confidence in investors, and Canada's ability to handle events. It is also undermining Canadians' confidence and trust in our institutions, our democracy, and ability of our police services to counter threats. Canadians need to know they can have confidence in the institutions of government.
- This situation is escalating. We each have to look at all possible measures to respond in the national interest, and we need to resolve the current challenges as quickly as possible. We

also need to present strong disincentives to deter potential future events. We do need to be proportional in our response. I fully recognize the risk of appearing to overreach and inflaming the very complaints about freedom that some are protesting. We have to walk that line very, very carefully.

- Some provinces and municipalities have declared states of emergency or taken other measures. Doug, I was pleased to see your announcement last week, declaring a state of emergency in Ontario and putting in place related measures. This gives you, and the police enforcing the law, significant tools to protect infrastructure and levy stiff penalties to those breaking the law. It also provides strong disincentives to individuals protesting illegally – such as revoking licences. And potentially impacting their livelihood for a long time to come.
- Tim, I saw what you did in Nova Scotia, under your provincial Emergency Management Act – banning blockades on roads or highways, with significant fines.
- There has been excellent collaboration between law enforcement agencies, between our ministers, and among officials – across the three levels of government. There have been many conversations about the situation.
- Thanks to all of you and your ministers for working so collaboratively to explore solutions to address the problems we are facing.
- For those of you who have not yet taken steps to prepare for these types of events, I encourage you to look at what Ontario and others have done with their emergency acts.
- No one is immune. Federal ministers would be pleased to help and Dominic can facilitate this. I know a number of provincial emergencies acts have been focused on natural disasters, but have to look at how they can be applied to public order disruptions.
- We are now at a point where we need to consider further options to address this national crisis. Today, we would like to consult you on the use of the federal Emergencies Act to assist our collective response efforts.
- You will recall we had the discussion at the start of the pandemic on the *Emergencies Act*. You advised caution at the time, and we agreed the Act was not needed. It is a good thing we decided not to use it at the time. But things are now very different, and the approach may need to be different.
- To ensure that we can have a candid and open exchange, I would ask that our consultations remain confidential.

- We have been looking at all the tools in the federal toolbox to see how we can most effectively complement your efforts.

Way we are looking at bringing it in – there has not been a final decision by government to do this. The step of consulting from you and hear from all of you is not a box-ticking exercise. It is required for very good reason. This Act has never been used in Canada's history. We need to get it right. Important to be united and coherent in our approach.

- This is not about displacing provincial or territorial jurisdiction, or even superseding measures you have in place.
- We are proposing measures that would supplement measures in your jurisdictions with additional federal authorities to give law enforcement including local law enforcement the maximum leverage to be able to uphold the rule of law and deal with the situation we are facing.
- The Emergencies Act is meant to be used for matters that have reached the level of a national emergency. We believe we have reached that point -- where there is a national emergency arising from threats to Canada's security. I convened an urgent Cabinet meeting last night and have the support of my ministers.
- I will turn to Minister Lametti in a moment to walk you through some of the details on the specific measures we are considering and would like to consult you on.
- But first, let me be clear - a declaration of emergency at the federal level is an extraordinary step and a measure of last resort. We recognize the gravity of the decision. I also want to assure you what this would NOT be – this is not about bringing in the military in any way shape or form. The federal Emergencies Act, in the way we plan to use it, does not contemplate bringing in troops. This is about empowering law enforcement with additional authorities, and collaboration and input from the federal level to restore order and security for our communities.
- This is about targeted, specific, temporary measures such as prohibiting the assembly of protestors in key areas, like border crossings, or directing essential services, like tow truck drivers. Everything that would be done under the Act would be compliant with the Charter and with our fundamental commitment to the rule of law.
- The Emergencies Act, which was brought in by the Mulroney government is molded from and is compliant with the Charter of Rights. There is no superseding of the Charter with the Emergencies Act

- We want to seek your advice and views on how best to respond to the current circumstances. Regardless of the course we ultimately take to respond, it is essential that we work together, in a collaborative and cooperative way.
- Bringing in the Emergencies Act, if this conversation goes well, is a first step. Already working with partners and officials on what are those measures that could be brought in. Once we have the authorities we will ensure we use the authorities in the right way to calm the situation and to prevent further blockades from taking root.
- This will involve ongoing engagement. Measures will be scalable, applied flexibly. We will make adjustments as needed, and add or remove locations. There are procedures in place, including through parliamentary review and public inquiry. There are many mechanisms to underscore proper procedures and getting it right. We will continue to cooperate and collaborate on moments of crisis across the country.
- I will now turn the floor over to you for comments and questions. In particular, I would like to hear your views on what measures you don't currently have that we could supplement through the Emergencies Act by using proportional, time-limited authorities. How can we help you? It would be good to hear how we can support you with these measures and how we can collaborate further.